

## A Review of Lepidoptera in Britain during 1978

by C. G. M. DE WORMS \*

Those early months of 1978 were appreciably different from those of their immediate predecessors, in that quite severe wintry conditions prevailed during both January and February, and very little was on the wing till right at the end of the latter month. However, quite a mild spring-like spell prevailed during the first half a March bringing out the early species of noctuids, mainly the *Orthosias* on normal time with the flowering of the willows which were at their best over the Easter holiday during the last week of March. April was on the whole a very fickle and by no means congenial month with, however, the final week giving some spring warmth. The season had become a distinctly late one. Among the first butterflies to appear both *Anthocharis cardamines* L. and *Celastrina argiolus* L. were exceptionally plentiful in most parts of the South of England, even more so than in 1977. As May progressed conditions became steadily warmer. The spring holiday in the last few days being one of the best periods of the year, with the thermometer well into the 70's. But in spite of this onset of warmth, insects at light were well below average and even *Clossiana euphrosyne* L. was only just appearing by the fourth week in May, with *C. selene* L. about ten days later. June proved yet another uncongenial period, though its early days produced quite a spate of the two bee-hawks with *Hemaris fuciformis* L. even more numerous in the south than it was in 1977, and *H. tityus* L. apparently quite common both in the Scottish Highlands and in western Ireland. At this period too, *Carterocephalus palaemon* Pall. was found to be fairly plentiful in several of its Highland haunts. But up to the turn of the year, virtually no migrants had been reported from any part of the British Isles.

Nearly all the woodland butterflies that appear at the beginning of the summer were late in their emergence and most of them such as *Aphantopus hyperantus* L. were not on the wing till well into July. Even *Maniola jurtina* L. was not out till nearly a fortnight after its usual time of appearance in mid-June. However, the opening of the second half of the year seemed much more favourable for the lepidoptera in general, and they proved much more prolific both by day and night. *Limenitis camilla* L. started flying the second week in July, when a summery spell began and this insect was about in more than its usual abundance, with quite a number of its melanic forms being recorded. *Argynnis paphia* followed about the middle of the month, distinctly on the late side but in fair plenty in several areas, especially in the region of the Surrey-Sussex border. *Apatura iris* L. appeared too about the middle of July, and was reasonably numerous in some of its well-known localities. During the later part of the month a small geometer new to the British List was recorded from

\* Three Oaks, Shores Road, Horsel, Woking, Surrey.

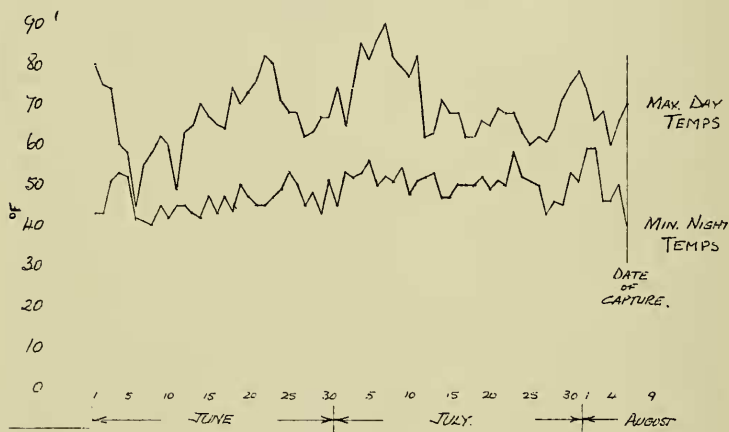
south Hampshire It was *Terponincta trimaculata* Hbn. a Mediterranean species which somehow found its way to our coast, possibly a genuine migrant. There was no heat wave in July and rather dull and sultry weather continued into August with the first *Lysandra coridon* Poda emerging virtually only in its first week, much later than in the previous season. Most of the summer Lycaenids were under strength throughout their flying period and in particular *Polyommatus icarus* Rott., whereas the Holly Blue had a very good second brood in most southern areas. Peacocks were in plenty by the middle of August as also was one of our most local moths, *Amathes stigmatica* Hübn., mainly in the Brecksand district. In this latter part of the summer, a few rarities appeared on the scene, notably an example of *Clostera anachoreta* D. & S. at Dungeness, and during the last week of August on the Lizard, a noctuid new to Britain, *Athetis hospes* Hbn. the size of *A. ambigua* D. & S. and not unlike it in markings. After a very agreeable August a very fine September heralded one of the best autumn periods experienced this century. A few Painted Ladies were seen in the south during the last half of August, but not many Red Admirals. It was mainly throughout September that there was a flood of Small Tortoiseshells over most of the southern regions. *Luperina nickerlii* Freyer in its form *gueneei*, was once more in some quantity in early September along various stretches of the north coast of Wales. Only a handful of the bigger migrant Sphingidae, such as *Herse convolvuli* L. and *Acherontia atropos* L., were reported from our coast or other parts at this period, though the paucity of these insects was soon to be followed by one of the most remarkable autumn immigrations of recent years, even on a bigger scale than that in late October 1977. But the chief invasion arrived in mid-October on the south coast with several *Leucania albipuncta* D. & S. On the 14th of that month two examples of *Trogonophora flammea* Esp. were recorded on the seaboard of Dorset. This fine noctuid of which very few specimens have been noted this century, was common about a hundred years ago on ivy bloom in Sussex and has recently appeared in abundance on Guernsey. So that there seems to be evidence that it may be starting a new colonisation of the mainland. About this time too, that small and attractive geometer *Rhodometra sacraria* L. was coming to light, mainly singly over a big area of southern Britain, even being recorded as far north as Edinburgh. These were accompanied by a few *Leucania loreyi* Dup. and quite an influx of *L. vitellina* Hbn. which was recorded from Yorkshire for the first time. Another interesting migrant was *Plusia orichalcea* F. taken in Gloucestershire. *Nycterosea obstipata* F. was quite numerous at light in late October together with a few *Cosymbia puppillaria* Hbn., *Laphygma exigua* Hbn. and the Pyrales *Palpita unionalis* Hbn. and *Uresiphita polygonalis* D. & S., but by far the biggest impact was made by numbers of *Leucania unipuncta* Haworth which had its largest spate since 1966, and was seen

in greater quantity on the south-eastern seaboard than ever before, mainly in November with some records of it even in December. Well over a hundred were also reported from Southern Eire, chiefly in Co. Cork. About a similar number were noted along the coast of Hampshire, Sussex and Kent, with a few records in the Eastern Counties. The final members of this migration wave were a few *Hippotion celerio* L., about the middle of November. It was on the whole a good autumn too for the usual resident species among which *Griposia aprilina* L. was in especial plenty, while *Lithophane leautieri* Boisid extended its range to East Kent.

After a poor start with hardly any migrants and a general paucity of insects and a late season, the second half of 1978 saw a distinct general improvement in numbers of lepidoptera, while the big autumn migration was a notable feature in a somewhat lean year.

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AN UNUSUAL ABERRATION OF THE SMALL TORTOISESHELL IN SCOTLAND. — I caught an aberration of *Aglais urticae* L. on valerian in my garden at this address on the 6th August 1977. Its wing span is 49 mm. and it is similar to ab. *semiichnusoides* Pronin, illustrated in Russwurm's *Aberrations of British Butterflies* (1978) plate 18, fig. 1.



Aberrations of this butterfly seem to be extremely rare in Scotland and if, as is thought, a factor in their appearance is temperature, then it is interesting to note on the temperature chart figured that on 7th July 1977 the temperature in my garden rose to 90 degrees F, an unusually high temperature for this part of the country. At what stage in its life cycle this temperature occurred is difficult to assess, but *urticae* normally emerges here from the middle of July onwards. — J. R. MILLER, Sealladh-mhor Crieff, Perthshire, PH7 4AD.